



## Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/technology-incubation-centers-set-stage-growth-african-food-processing-enterprises>

## Technology Incubation Centers Set the Stage for Growth in African Food Processing Enterprises



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A 2012 military coup d'état in Mali left many of the country's rural food producers struggling to recover from months of violence and instability that disrupted their livelihoods and threatened regional food security. But six months after the coup, a group of women entrepreneurs in Mopti, a town in the northern region of Mali, was still processing sorghum and millet and successfully selling their products, all while making loan payments on new, modernized equipment that supports their expanded operations.

The women's group in Mopti is reaping the benefits of a technology incubation center launched in 2011 by Mali's Institute of Rural Economy with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In addition to supplying seven grain processing enterprises in northern Mali with mechanized equipment and training, the center worked with small- and medium-scale processors to produce high-quality, marketable products, and with local commercial bakeries to produce sorghum and millet flours for bread making.

The technology incubation center in Mali is one of several that have been established in West Africa by a range of African and U.S. partners from the [International Sorghum and Millet Collaborative Research Support Program](#) (INTSORMIL CRSP), a predecessor of [Feed the Future's Innovation Lab for Collaborative Research on Sorghum and Millet](#), now based at Kansas State University. The INTSORMIL CRSP, which ended in 2013, made major contributions to global food security over [30 years of investment](#) in critical research on grains, laying the foundation for Feed the Future to scale up innovations in the farming and processing of cereal crops today.

Technology incubation centers are one of the legacies of this research investment. Designed to increase the competitiveness of local food processing industries, incubation centers help small-scale entrepreneurs develop high-quality sorghum and millet products for commercial sale using inexpensive, locally appropriate food processing technologies. With support from both U.S. universities and African scientists, the centers train food processors to use mechanized equipment and operate as a kind of lab to develop new products like pearled couscous and enriched flour blends.

For a nominal fee, entrepreneurs can use the centers to test and grow the local market for new products while receiving technical and business support. Processors are also educated on the importance of purchasing high-quality grain for their businesses and are encouraged to obtain it from local farmers. Most of the processors utilizing these incubation centers are women.

The concept for these technology-based incubation centers was initially developed and refined in Niger and has

demonstrated success in Senegal as well as Mali. The centers are helping to carve out local and regional markets for traditional food products like couscous and boulet, which are popular in West African countries but typically have to be imported from North Africa or Europe.

Through sustained USAID investment in sorghum and millet research, a strong network of scientists and entrepreneurs has emerged to build “downstream” opportunities in these value chains, i.e. connecting food producers and processors to a consumer market with strong demand for their products. The new Feed the Future Innovation Lab will build on this legacy with an increased focus on fortified sorghum and millet products that can position smallholders to earn more income supplying nutritious foods.

*The INTSORMIL CRSP, established in 1979, began a new phase in 2013 as the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Collaborative Research on Sorghum and Millet to nurture a new wave of collaboration to produce agricultural innovations such as climate-resilient crop varieties and more profitable market approaches for farmers in Ethiopia, Senegal, Niger, Mali and beyond.*